



Preservation of Remains



Objectives

- Understand the duty of the U.S. to provide a full accounting and the impact of remains preservation on providing an accounting.
- Discuss the importance of ensuring the safety of the Service Member in the retrieval of remains in combat or combat-like conditions.
- Discuss procedures and best practices in the preservation of remains in combat and combat-like conditions.
- State cultural implications regarding preservation of remains.
- Discuss medical planning considerations regarding preservation of remains



Duty to provide a full accounting

- “I will never leave a fallen comrade”
- Full accounting requires:
 - Proper identification
 - Explanation as to the cause and manner of death
- Family members expect and deserve a full accounting.
- Providing a full accounting takes precedence over any procedure that may or may not preserve remains.



Impact of remains preservation on providing a full accounting

- Decomposition is the breakdown of a formerly living body into simpler forms of matter
- As decomposition progresses, evidentiary and identification material may be lost
- Factors affecting decomposition: temperature, humidity, seasonal climate.
- Embalming:
 - Slows decomposition, but does not stop it
 - Loss of essential forensic evidence (toxicology testing, autopsy)
 - Decreased ability to conduct DNA testing
 - Will not stop the decomposition process if it has already set in.
 - Note: Many faiths and customs forbid embalming



Living and the Dead

- We honor our fallen service members and will do everything possible to return them to their families as quickly as possible

BUT-

Protection of the Living is always more important than recovery and preservation of the Dead!



Soldiers killed in Action

- If a soldier is KIA and you are not able to immediately retrieve the body, a spot report is generated identifying the location of the body. Either a 10 digit grid coordinate or GPS site location is needed.
- Once the body is recovered it should be discretely separated from other injured soldiers.



Post-Mortem Care

- The body of the deceased should be placed in a human remains pouch. Weapons, ammunition, and classified material should be removed; everything else stays in place
- If a remains pouch is not available, shroud the remains with a blanket, poncho, mattress cover or other appropriate item. This is important in providing dignity and respect.
- Do not remove any treatment adjuncts from the body, they will be needed during the autopsy; send any clothing, body armor or helmets that have been removed during treatment with the body. Do not wash any portion of the body. This could destroy forensic evidence.



Post-Mortem Care

- All medical plans must include coordination with mortuary affairs to ensure the most expeditious movement and preservation of remains
- As all cases are considered forensic death, do not alter the remains with “shroud kits” or other hospital type postmortem care



Post-Mortem Care

- Insure the body has the proper identification. At least three tags are required; two on the body usually on the great toe and the wrist. The third is placed on the actual remains pouch.
- Ensure the body is place in a shaded cool area if possible, that is separated from the remaining casualties until the remains can be placed in refrigeration



Actions to preserve remains

- Maintain close coordination with Mortuary Affairs to allow for quick transfer of remains
- Place the remains in a refrigerated environment as soon as possible. The temperature should be maintained between 34 and 37 degrees Fahrenheit, taking care not to freeze the body.
 - Refrigeration units, Cooler
 - Refrigeration decreases the rate of body decomposition
 - Refrigeration preserves evidentiary and identification material



Actions to preserve remains

- Leaving the deceased's body on a ward, EMT department, or operating table for an extended period of time will lead to faster decomposition
- If refrigeration unit is not available– place the remains in a sealed remains pouch, then place the into another pouch filled with ice. It is important that the ice does not come into direct contact with the skin. Ensure that the remains is checked periodically until the remains can be placed in a refrigeration unit.



Notification

- Ensure the unit leadership is alerted and they have notified the proper authorities to claim the body.

***“I will never
leave a fallen
comrade...”***

